

‘PAVING PARADISE’
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PROLOGUE:

LIGHT BUILDS ON THE TREE, MUSIC UNDER THE SPEECH

TREE 1, 2 & 3: (slowly, thoughtfully) I stand. I watch. That is what I do. That is all I do.

TREE 1: But the standing, the watching, is enough. For someone must note the passing of the days and years, chronicle the changes, or how will we know where we have been or where we are going? Your lifetime is so short, your time here so brief, your chance to understand so slim – but our span is long, pushing back roots deep into history, yours and ours, and sending out shoots to the future, yours and ours.

TREE 2: I have much to say but few will listen, the days of listening to our kind seem far off now, a distant memory. If any should wish to hear my words, my story, what I have seen, see now and will see, they need only ask.

TREE 3: I, and my kind, serve you well, and in the past you have served us well also. We have been everything to you: a source of shelter, of material to build your home, to warm your winter & light your darkness. We have provided you with everything from the ships that allowed you to spread your arms around the globe to a playground for your little ones. And you gave us the space to simply be, to stand, to watch.

TREE 1: It was a deal, a balance, a covenant.

TREE 1, 2 & 3: A covenant broken is a dangerous thing. We make the very air that you breathe, you cross us at your peril. I stand, I watch, I hear...I hear... I hear...

A SUDDEN CHANGE IN TONE AS THE PUPILS WALK ON, DISCUSSING THEIR PROJECT. THERE IS A TABLE AND SOME CHAIRS WHICH THEY FOCUS AROUND.

SCENE ONE: IN SCHOOL, MONDAY

CHRIS: (indignant, walking around stropfully) I don't believe this, I really don't believe this!

TERRY: I don't get you, I mean, what's not to believe?

CHRIS: How did I end up with you lot? What am I doing here? I shouldn't be here.

SAM: Then where should you be?

ALEX: Some of us actually want to do this, some of us are actually interested in this – want to do something worthwhile. If you don't, then you shouldn't have chosen it!

CHRIS: I was off last week, wasn't well, so when all this was being set up - I didn't *choose* anything. I've been lumped in with you.

JOOLS: Everybody *chose* something, the whole year group, everyone! And it was sorted ages ago, weeks ago. There was 'sport coaching', there was 'web design', 'enterprise stuff', some big 'science-thing'...

JAY: I nearly chose that one – it looked good.

SAM: You do realise we're off timetable for the whole week to get this done? And it's just us, no help, we succeed or we fail just by what we do – *by ourselves*.

CHRIS: (sits, slumped and thinks) I might pull a sickie...

TERRY: (in disbelief) What?

CHRIS: Well, I'm still not on top form, had a migraine over the weekend - I could just be ill, couldn't I? Is it hot in here – (to Alex) can you open a window...?

ALEX: (whilst doing it) Wait a minute...we're the people you'll be working with – you're not supposed to tell us if you're going to *pretend to be ill*. *Don't tell us* you are planning to lie *to us*.

CHRIS: I'm poorly. Stretching the truth is very different from lying – I think you'll find.

JOOLS: You don't really get it do you – you're only responsible to us, we're all responsible to each other, for each other. It's about learning things for real, *functional skills*, and all that.

TERRY: Actually, truth be told... I don't even know what a 'functional skill' is.

SAM: Doing things for real, not just in the classroom.

JAY: 'Functional skills' – very useful, good 'hands on' experience, a chance to have a go.

CHRIS: I don't have many functional skills.

SAM: Fine! Then this week – we’ll see if (thinks the task might be too big) we... can... find some...for you.

ALEX: (to Chris) That was probably *meant to be* nicer than it sounded.

SAM: It was.

JOOLS: So... who’s in charge?

TERRY: Not me.

JAY: I guess we all are.

ALEX: We all chip in ideas, all help carry it out, all get assessed - together, *as a group*.

JOOLS: (dismissively) Now *that* can’t go wrong...

JAY: Equal share, division of labour, carve up the responsibility, get it done efficiently. Like adults.

CHRIS: (as if pointing out the obvious) But, right, if we were adults we wouldn’t be in school.

SAM: (trying to focus them all) Listen, everyone; no leaders, no slackers – a team...deal?

CHRIS: So, supposing that I might not have actually chosen to sign up for this, supposing, right, that for whatever reason, I was just kind of put down for this because I didn’t really put my name against anything - what have I actually got involved in? What are we... *doing*?

TERRY: (astonished) You really don’t know?

CHRIS: (flaring up) I really don’t know! Ok? I thought I was going to English this morning.

TERRY: (under the breath) I don’t believe it.

CHRIS: Sometimes I miss things, it’s not my fault! (mocking) We’re not all like you!

TERRY: (accusing) And thankfully, we’re not all like you!

SAM: (calmly, but firmly) In answer to your question, what we’re doing this week is, according to what we signed up for, an... ‘Environmental Arts Project’.

CHRIS: Forget it - I can’t draw.

ALEX: Not ‘art’ – ‘arts’.

SAM: *Any arts* - music, drama, dance, poetry.

CHRIS: Wow. You’ve literally just listed the four things I really can’t stand.

ALEX: You must like music? Everybody likes music.

CHRIS: (patronising) But I can’t *make it*.

ALEX: And I bet you watch drama on TV.

CHRIS: (two current titles of any current TV show) and stuff. I like that.

ALEX: And lots of song lyrics are just poetry set to music.

JOOLS: And Rap.

CHRIS: (more upbeat) I like Rap.

TERRY: And I bet you like the kind dance people do online.

CHRIS: I like that, yeah.

SAM: So, that's music, drama, dance, writing. You see, we're getting somewhere. Moving forward. All we need to do by the end of the week is... (looks to Terry) what does it say in the brief?

TERRY: The brief says we have to...(laying a piece of paper out) *"Prepare and set in motion any event which uses arts experiences to raise awareness of environmental issues. Your event, publication, performance or exhibition should promote debate around issues of climate change, waste, recycling, habitat erosion, renewable energy etc'.*

JOOLS: Now listen, I just want you to know, right from the start, that I'm here to do what it said there, *promote debate*. Don't expect me to be here as some 'tow the line' mouth-piece for the bunny-huggers.

SAM: (taken aback) Oh, right. Maybe you're in the wrong place...

JOOLS: (getting agitated) Maybe I'm in the right place, as long as this week is actually about looking at this thing from both sides. That's the best way to raise awareness in my book, not just spout some 'Day After Tomorrow' propaganda. Listen (begins a speech which Jools has used before) my dad says that mother nature puts much more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere every time a volcano erupts than we ever have. And I think it's almost vanity to think that we could do anything to alter a system that's been ticking over for four and a half billion years – do you really think that us burning oil, driving cars, flying planes for two or three hundred years is going to knock that out of balance? You really think so? Well, I'm certainly not convinced.

AN UNCOMFORTABLE MOMENT

CHRIS: Hold on...we've got to do all that? All what it said in that...

SAM: 'Brief'.

CHRIS: 'Brief'...yeah.
TERRY: That's right.
CHRIS: One week?
ALEX: Yes.
CHRIS: It's going to be too hot to think at all this week
TERRY: It could be a long one, that's for sure.
CHRIS: It would be easier just going to English.
SAM: (firmly) But you will not pull a sickie – ok?
CHRIS: As long as you know, I'm still not on top form...
SAM: (a little irritated) We know...
CHRIS: ...and I can't draw.
JOOLS, SAM, TERRY, ALEX, JAY: (curtly) We know! (they all freeze)

MUSIC

SCENE TWO: AT THE PARK

TREE 1, 2 & 3: I listen. I hear.

TREE 3: I pick things up from the air around me, feel the motion of the earth beneath me. Feet on the ground, head in the clouds. Another balance, another play of dark and light, of solid and insubstantial.
What secrets I hold beneath my skin. What a record of passing time I have been. The children that have played beneath my canopy, the dozing in the dappled shade and the picnic taken after the harvest was in. The lovers who kissed and carved their names, the promises made, the secrets whispered.

TREE 2: But so many times the men have marched past, dark times of fear and violence. Times of musket-ball, of longbow, of canon mounted on sturdy wheels, moving out to splinter other trunks & shatter young bone. When the men marched back they were so few, so broken. Willowy saplings, so simply snapped.

TREE 1: And the boy who carved his name was not among them, and the girl touched her hand to my skin daily, an act of remembrance, an observance. Her hand, colder than before, a light dimmed, even as her child played beside me, beneath my protection, within my boughs. I have seen much. Light, dark, light, dark...sun rise, sun set, full moon, sliver

moon, Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter, a thousand times around and more...

TREE 1, 2 & 3: I have seen much. *I know you.*

MUSIC

SCENE THREE: IN SCHOOL, LATER THE SAME DAY

SAM: Ok, have we all done what we agreed?

ALEX: I think so.

TERRY: It wasn't so hard – an hour to come up with something we can do to fulfil the brief.

CHRIS: 'Brief'?

TERRY: (as if talking to an idiot) What we've been asked to do.

JOOLS: And now we all present to each other, and we make a firm decision, here & now and move forward with what we decide on, all behind it, all working towards it. Just get the thing done.

SAM: Like we agreed.

CHRIS: (suddenly bright) I know! I've thought of something.

SAM: And no-one's allowed to be too protective or precious about not using their idea, we can only have one, and we need to put all our energy behind it.

CHRIS: I'm not precious.

TERRY: (snapping) You're telling me.

CHRIS: Was that a joke?

TERRY: If you can't tell...!

JOOLS: So who goes first?

ALEX: Let's do it by the first letter in our favourite musical!

ALL STOP AND LOOK AT ALEX, BAFFLED

JAY: Let's do it by birthdays.

SAM: Good idea.

JAY: In the year or in the month?

SAM: The month...? Cool?

JOOLS: Anyone else born on the first?

ALEX: I'm the second.

A PAUSE

TERRY: Anyone before the fifteenth? (no response) Me next then I guess.

JAY: Twenty second.

SAM: Twenty eighth.

TERRY: Good – and...

CHRIS: And...?

TERRY: Your birthday? After the twenty eighth?

CHRIS: Yeah, not for ages.

JAY: Right...but when in the month?

CHRIS: (speaking as if Jay is stupid) It isn't this month.

ALEX: (trying to be calm) But what day of the month is it?

CHRIS: I just said, it isn't this –

SAM: (clearly) So what day of *any month* is it – what day of the month that *it is* in!

CHRIS: Twenty first! (confused) What? Hold on... are you trying to get my migraine back? (to Alex) Did you open that window...?

ALEX: Yes.

TERRY: Twenty first...so you'll go fourth.

CHRIS: Oh... I see, all right – I just didn't get it. Wasn't sure. (to Terry) Like you're so perfect.

TERRY: Ok, let's just get on with it...

JOOLS: (stepping forward, addressing the rest) I think it's important to remember that we've been asked to start a debate, so we do precisely that, a formal 'this house proposes', 'this house opposes' kind of debate – thrash it all out. Give all the facts and figure, not just from one side. Take a vote, a public vote. (sits back down)

ALEX: (steps up, very excitedly) Ok. Me then. Well I'm thinking something along the lines of, like a West End show, hire a venue, stage some of the best songs from the shows, light, colour, costumes, make-up, the lot. Very sparkly, very eyes and teeth, and very life-affirming and upbeat – but, and here's where we really tick the box, we finish with Michael Jackson's 'Earth Song', all of us on stage, with like, little kids and stuff, and film projected in the background of like animals dying and stuff. It will really get to people – move them.

CHRIS: It'll move them out of the theatre...

SAM: No comments yet please.

CHRIS: (sarcastically) Sorry boss.

ALEX: Well, that was it really. Finish with the big eco-number and maybe have website addresses of charities and stuff. Close curtains, lights down, job done. (sits down)

TERRY: (shuffles up) Me? Cool. Goth gig, simple. Hit home the message that we're all going to hell, fast, and it's going to hurt, and it's our fault. (sits) You next.

CHRIS: Oh, right. (clearly thinks it's a great idea) Litter pick at the park!

A SILENT MOMENT FROM THE OTHERS AS THEY LET THIS SINK IN

JAY: (stand to address the group) I think perhaps a Green Day could be staged, stalls, information stands, facts & figures about what we're all doing to the planet and how small changes – if enough people do them – can have a big impact. I think we could get that together in a week. All people need to know in one place, a one-stop-green-shop, leaflets, talks, posters...yeah, that's what I think...(sits)

SAM: Ok...(stands to address the group) Now, let me tell you where my idea came from – you see we're doing Myths in English at the moment, Greek Myths, Roman Myths, Creation Myths - lots of stuff –

JOOLS: We know...

TERRY: We're all doing Myths.

CHRIS: Are we?

ALEX: No comments please...thank you. (indicates to SAM to continue)

SAM: Right, where was I... and I said 'Excuse me, but what's the point of doing work on myths which were made up by people who are all dead, to be told to people who are all dead, and they're only like children's stories anyway...' and my teacher said...

TEACHER: (Walking on, as if in the memory of SAM) Children's stories? Dead people? Someone's missing the point somewhere.

SAM: But they're not exactly useful, not to us, not now, are they?

TEACHER: (talking to the audience, as if they are a class) It's my hope that during these lessons you'll not just think about 'this myth' or 'that myth', but the nature of myth itself. Why do some live on, what do we learn from them,

are some of them little guides for life – do they offer assistance where facts and figures fall short? Can they explore foolishness and heroism, nobility and vanity in a way that appeals to the imagination not just the intellect?

SAM: They're just stories.

TEACHER: We all need stories.

SAM: And they're not even true stories.

TEACHER: Good point, but don't confuse something *being true* and something *revealing a truth* – subtle difference. The story of Hamlet isn't true, Romeo & Juliet isn't true, The Odyssey... they are fictions, imaginings, conjured from nothing but words but with real things to say about our real lives, still after all these years. Call them untrue if you want, all these myths, fables, tales, stories, but they're still with us, and there must be a reason for that. (pauses) Perhaps that's all storytelling is, lying with a purpose. Righteous deceit.

SAM: I guess they help us to understand old cultures better.

TEACHER: Better than that, they help us to understand *us* better. For example. we know what people mean when they say something is just 'the Emperor's new clothes' or if it takes a 'Herculean effort' to do something. (thinks of more) We talk about a 'Trojan horse' in computers, a 'David and Goliath' football match and we know what we mean if someone has opened a 'Pandora's box'. It's a shortcut to a common understanding – and surely that's got to be good. If you don't use myth in your speech now and then, well, that could be seen as a weakness – or to put it another way... your 'Achilles Heel' –....(walks off)

SAM: And that sort of stuck with me, and that's what I'm suggesting. Because you see, what we're facing here, the global issue, the climate change, all that, is so big, so massive that we find it hard to find our way through it with facts and figures alone. We might know that a sea temperature rise of such and such a percent equates to diversity depletion of so many thousand, but it's just numbers, just figures, and in truth, I don't think we respond that well to figures, numbers. (sees the group looking a bit 'blank') What we respond well to is stories, myths, fables, allegories, things that tell us about A by showing us B, does that make sense? It's our ability to

imagine what isn't there - *the story*, which helps us to imagine what could be there – *a way out of this mess*, a way of moving forward. (still struggling a little)

So I think we need to make a new myth, a new story, which captivates people, surprises them, entertains and delights them, helps them to learn something & makes them think differently – and we need to spread that myth somehow, as far and as wide as we can in the week that we've got. Like viral marketing – it just needs to be interesting. It's simple. We need to *tell the world a new story to help it understand itself better*. That's all.
(sits)

A BEAT

TERRY: (sarcastically) Right. That's simple then...
CHRIS: Sounds like doing English after all...
ALEX: Could there be a song?
SAM: Could be, yeah.
JAY: (after a pause) Ok, so now we vote, just by simple show of hands, one per person and you can't vote for your own ok? Right, the formal debate. (no hands) right. The musical...event (no hands) ok. Goth Gig (no hands) litter pick on the park(no hands) the Green Day information thing (three hands) and the new...myth...viral...marketing thing. (three hands). Oh...ok...

MUSIC

SCENE FOUR: AT THE PARK

TREE 1: There comes wisdom with age. Something that is easily forgotten – but dangerous to forget, so dangerous.
TREE 2: The eyes of the old are the only eyes which see far back, know of the old ways, the forgotten ways, the simpler ways. Perhaps there is much to learn, but how to listen? That is the question.
TREE 3: I see your old, I see how you treat them. No one hears their tales, none want to know what they have to tell. None listen. And even the oldest of your kind has only a fragment, a fragment of the time I have had, seen only a glimpse of what I have seen.
TREE 1, 2 & 3: I am old, I stand, I watch, I listen.

SCENE FIVE: IN SCHOOL, THE END OF THE FIRST DAY

JAY: So, we're agreed? Each of us goes away and gets as much information as they can, as many facts and figures as we can – hard evidence – statistics, projections, forecasts, anything you can get your hands on. We need evidence which people can't ignore.

SAM: And each of us comes back with a story to tell, we'll share them & decide which one to present at the Green Day, and we'll do it as well as we can to as many people as we can. If we're lucky and clever, this thing might have gone round the world by then.

CHRIS: Of course, it might not have gone round the school by then.

SAM: But we're going to be positive aren't we.

CHRIS: (falsely) Oh yes.

ALEX: Do you mean Green Day, the band?

JOOLS: So we're ending up doing *two things*?

JAY: One thing –

SAM: - from two sides.

JAY: The hard and the soft.

SAM: Engaging people's brains and their imaginations. Intellect and soul.

JOOLS: Like I said, *two things*. And I still think we only need to be talking to people's *intellects*, not their *souls* - whatever that means.

SAM: It means engaging with the part of them that has the ability to care, to hope, to aspire to more...

JOOLS: Whatever.

ALEX: And are you sure we'll get permission to do it at the park?

TERRY: They're hardly going to turn us down are they – imagine the bad press they'd get.

ALEX: You see, I don't much like Green Day...

JOOLS: As long as we leave it as we found it.

ALEX: *Better* than we found it.

SAM: Good point.

JOOLS: Then they can't complain.

ALEX: And really we should do the whole thing as green as we can, recycle everything, low impact, you know. (as if just realising) Oh...*green...day*.

SAM: Yeah, a day which is...

ALEX: Green.

TERRY: You got it! Listen, I reckon there's all sorts of people my mum knows who would put up a stall for a few hours.

ALEX: If the weather's nice it'll be great.

TERRY: We'll be in danger of actually enjoying it.

JAY: And even get good marks...

CHRIS: That'll be a first.

SAM: So tomorrow, the hard and the soft – facts and figures – stories and myths.

CHRIS: (proudly) I've already thought of one.

SAM: Well you've got all evening to... *perfect* it!

JAY: Not a bad day's work, all in all. So back here, on time tomorrow, ready for action.

SAM: 'Action'...yeah.

ALEX: I'm so glad it's not just about the one band – much nicer...

THEY ALL SAY THEIR GOODBYES ('See you in the morning', 'Don't forget to do what we said' etc.) & LEAVE THE SPACE

SCENE SIX: AT THE PARK

TREE 1, 2 & 3: *Action*. (as if mulling it over) Action. An interesting idea.

TREE 2: Of course I am in action all the time, at every moment. Growing, shooting out, budding, curling up, dying back, but never dying out. *Deciduous*. Action, always action. Action below, action above.

TREE 1: But my actions are slow, pensive, ponderous, deliberate, methodical – too subtle, too delicate for the human eye. Perhaps this has been where the problem lies. You think we are inactive, unengaged, uninvolved, simple dumb bystanders.

TREE 3: But we have a stake in this thing we call 'the future', and who can know that better than one who has seen so much of the thing we call 'the past'. I desire a say, I demand to be heard.

TREE 1, 2 & 3: And if my slow and subtle entreaties have been ignored then perhaps action is all that is left to me. Yes...*action*...how novel...

**A SUDDEN CHANGE AS THE STAGE IS TAKEN UP WITH THE WORLD OF MYTH,
NEW MUSIC, LIGHTS ETC, AND A DIFFERENT FEEL TO THE MOVEMENT AND
SPEECH.**

SCENE SEVEN: TUESDAY

MYTH VOICE 6: *The beast had terrorised the people of the village for some time. But the beast was growing, and those that lived closest to its lair knew most about its dangers. Those who lived far off hoped the beast would never travel as far as their homes and their farms, to eat their livestock and crush their crops.*

MYTH VOICE 5: *Those who lived nearest to the lair of the beast knew something had to be done – and a meeting was held in the village square to decide what to do.*

MYTH VOICE 4: *Many people spoke about how they would like to help – if only they had the time, some said that they would like to do something, but they feared it would do no good anyway, others felt that they were of no consequence against such a terrible foe and this, they said, was their reason for doing nothing.*

MYTH VOICE 3: *Some even said that they were old, their productive days were behind them and so why was this their problem after all...?*

MYTH VOICE 6: *As the meeting closed and the people drifted away, two children from a family who farmed land close by the lair of the creature spoke up.*

MYTH VOICE 1: *Said the eldest: If everyone here is to do nothing, nothing at all, then we may as well give up, we may as well sit in our homes, place our heads in our hands and weep away our final days.*

MYTH VOICE 2: *Said the youngest: who here thinks this is not your problem – who here does not have a brother or a sister, or a friend who has not been blighted by this devil?*

MYTH VOICE 1: *Said the elder: And you think this terror will go away if we ignore it, leave it to grow unhindered?*

- MYTH VOICE 2: *Said the younger: it will become a horror the like of which you cannot imagine. And we must do something, all of us, today, here, now.*
- MYTH VOICE 1: *Each night the beast slumbers, with snoring and snarling to scare all other creatures, but it sleeps deep.*
- MYTH VOICE 6: *From the crowd came a voice: And what are we to do, cut its throat in the night? Sure, it will wake and devour any who tries.*
- MYTH VOICE 2: *The younger said: We need not kill this thing, only hold it in, build around it a wall which it cannot scale. Then we may feed it what we like or let it starve if we wish.*
- MYTH VOICE 3: *But the crowd would not hear and slowly walked off, heads held low. Leaving just the two, together alone. They did not even go home, but gave themselves to the task. All night they worked around the slumbering, snoring stinking beast and built, stone by stone, the beginnings of a wall.*
- MYTH VOICE 4: *As day broke the beast awoke and stumbled towards the village and the promise of food. The wall was no obstacle to the creature and it was smashed underfoot – undoing a night’s work in seconds.*
- MYTH VOICE 6: *But that night the two were there, that night again they laboured, and the morning brought the same reward for their work - scattered stones.*
- MYTH VOICE 5: *Word spread that the siblings would not give up their task and on the third night a handful of villagers came to watch the work. As stone upon stone was laid, end to end, up and up they sat and watched. The elder and the younger toiled as before but as day broke the story ended the same way, a trampled pile of rock under monstrous foot, and the people of the countryside terrorised again.*
- MYTH VOICE4 : *The fourth night a small crowd was drawn of bystanders, idle chatterers. The fifth night was bigger still, people were keen to see their hard work and watch as it was destroyed the next morning as they all knew it would be.*
- MYTH VOICE 6: *The sixth night drew a crowd of people not just from the village, but from all the surrounding countryside, fires were lit, food was*

brought, blankets were laid out and the people sat back and watched, for there was little else to do in the area.

MYTH VOICE 3: *On the seventh night the crowd jostled to see the two young people as they toiled. They were exhausted, near the end of their strength – a week’s work behind them and no promise of success. Finally, as the elder approached the wall with a stone there was a stumble and a fall, a silence grew through the crowd as one of the two lay, face down in the dirt. A sigh from the assembled crowd was heard. Perhaps the spectacle was finally over thought the people. Perhaps it was time to go home.*

MYTH VOICE 1: *And then, from the crowd, a small child stepped forward. Silently she walked to where the older one lay. All eyes were on this little child. Several small steps were taken towards where the exhausted figure lay, beaten and crumpled, and the low wall and the menace on the far side of it. And then the child bent down.*

MYTH VOICE 2: *And then the child, the youngest there by far, tried to pick up the stone that lay by the elder sibling. Pick it up the child could not, but deterred the child was not, a smaller stone was spied and taken it in those small hands.... And then the child walked towards the wall.*

MYTH VOICE 1 & 2: *And the stone was placed it where the child thought it belonged.*

MYTH VOICE 3, 4, 5 & 6: *And those small hands picked up another, and placed it in the wall.*

MYTH VOICE 1 & 2 : *Again, again the child, watched by the whole crowd helped to do build the wall. And as another stone was picked up the child said to the two: I am small, I cannot do so much as you – but what I can do, I will do.*

**OVER THIS SPEECH THE FOCUS GOES FROM THE MYTH CAST TO THE PUPILS,
SAM FADING IN AS THE MYTH FADES OUT**

MYTH VOICE 6 & SAM: *And the grandparents of the child joined in, lifted a stone, and placed it in the wall. And then the parents – the cousins, the neighbour, all the neighbours. (MYTH VOICE 6 trails off) Blacksmith,*

farmer, baker, wheelwright, plough-boy. Slowly each person, each of the thousand present, took their part in the building of the wall.

SAM: So many there were that the work was no trial at all, after each had lifted and placed perhaps a dozen stones, sometimes twenty stones... the wall was built. Strong and high and solid and sturdy.

BY NOW THERE IS NO TRACE OF MYTH CAST, WE ARE BACK IN THE REALITY OF THE SCHOOL.

JAY: (to SAM) 'Strong and high and solid and sturdy' and...?

SAM: And... that's about as far as I've got. It was going through my head all night, I was trying to make something which sounded, you know, ancient, but with something modern to say.

CHRIS: What's it supposed to be saying?

SAM: (ignoring CHRIS) Is it ok? At least it's a start – now if we hear everyone's we'll have something to choose from at least?

ALEX: I really like it.

JAY: I think it's got potential – do you know how it finishes?

SAM: Not really.

CHRIS: Do they all die?

ALL: No.

SAM: I just wanted a simple way to say that if each person does something small then it, like, adds up to something big.

TERRY: And something small, if it's done day-in day-out ceases to be small.

CHRIS: What's the wall about then?

JOOLS: Forget it.

JAY: That's a great start – shall we carry on? Shall I do mine, I'm happy to – get it out of the way....unless anyone else...no? Ok, here we go.

AGAIN A MERGE FROM 'REALITY' INTO 'MYTH'

JAY: None of the people saw it coming. None of them could have imagined it would ever happen. In their comfortable palaces of glass and brick and timber and chrome and steel, they thought they were... impregnable.

JAY & MYTH VOICE 1: Unassailable. Masters of the universe. They were cool in the summer time and warm in the wintertime, they had food to eat and distractions aplenty – the people wanted for nothing and thought themselves to be at the very pinnacle of all existence.

MYTH VOICE 1: Little could they have imagined that their supremacy was to be challenged and their reign was to come to an abrupt and undignified end...

WE ARE NOW FULLY INTO THE MYTH

MYTH VOICE 2: *...It began in a small way. 'Oh!' Screamed the wife 'there are ants in the kitchen, they have invaded our home from the outside world! Ants and woodlice and things of a crawling nature – kill them husband, expunge and exterminate them! Sort them out!'*

ALL MYTH VOICES: *'Sort them out I will my dear' said the man*

MYTH VOICE 3: *And the man ran to the kitchen to protect his world of shiny chrome and lacquered wood-effect from the nibbling wriggling creatures. A kettle of boiling water was prepared – and a bottle of unknown chemical compound to dispatch the creatures to their painful end. And the man raised the kettle and the bottle above the collection of small beasts...and the small beasts looked up with their small black eyes....*

ALL MYTH VOICES: *And then a tap was heard.*

MYTH VOICE 4: *'Oh!' Screamed the wife 'At the window! All manner of small creatures, all wings and tails and fur and feather, claws and talons and teeth and eyes – sort them out!'*

MYTH VOICE 5: *And peering in through the uPVC and triple-glaze were a hundred tiny black eyes – watching. Waiting.*

MYTH VOICE 6: *'Sort them out I will my dear' said the man, and he ran to the door to scare away the beast with the toes and the talons which would scratch his precious pristine plastic. If the man made one mistake that day, he made it then. With a tennis racquet in one hand and a popular daily newspaper in the other he leaped from the door making what he hoped was a sound most terrifying. He whirled and he spun, he lashed out and he struck out – a desperate man defending, as is his right, his castle. Within a handful of moments*

the husband had exhausted himself and sat on the bonnet of his shiny, shiny car. And as he sat, he watched the procession, all manner of small birds and beasts paraded proudly through his tropical hardwood front door.

MYTH VOICE 1: *Robins and thrushes and gulls and finches and squirrels and voles and toads and hedgehogs and foxes and badgers and others he had not the names for. And he sat and he waited. He knew it would come. And come it did. And when it came, the scream from his wife was fit to deafen all those close by – and she ran from the house and sat on the lap of the man who was sat on his shiny, shiny car.*

MYTH VOICE 2: *‘Do you think they have stopped?’ she said ‘I think they have stopped’, as they sat, clinging to the car and to each other, a quiet descended and she whispered ‘I hope they have stopped’. But the man looked towards the horizon and said. ‘Stopped, they have not’*

MYTH VOICE 3: *A sort of shifting shuffling formless shape of many things all together as one was all that could be seen at first, but closer they came, closer. The creatures were on the rise. Here a common cow, there a wolf and a moose and a bison. Elk, mongoose, ostrich, serpents of all size and colour, lizards and birds and lumbering hulks of all kinds of furry forms.*

MYTH VOICE 5: *In the house of the man and the wife they went, and in all the houses of the street, in all the streets of the towns, even the fish from the murk of the rivers and the streams hopped and plopped into the back garden ponds of all the homes across the land. All this as the people sat on all the bonnets and all the roofs of all their shiny, shiny cars.*

MYTH VOICE 4: *And the last to come were the bears of white – the last to come for they had come the furthest. And before they took up residence in the houses of brick and glass and timber and chrome and steel, they stopped. And the largest of them looked up the street and down the street – he looked at the confused and bemused faces of the people and then...*

ALL MYTH VOICES: *... he spoke.*

MYTH VOICE 6: *“We must, and we do, apologise for this intrusion. This action, we never intended. We are exiles, we are immigrants. We are strangers in a strange land. But we know you will make us welcome for we are here because of you.*
For so long you have ignored the fact that you are part of the cycle. For so long you have sat, like the simpleton woodcutter, on the very branch at which you cut away. You failed to realise that the earth will always find a new stability in the face of any challenge, will always find a new balance. It so happens that after so long, the balance has simply turned out to not be in your favour any longer. You have become what you should have always known you were – just another animal.
Your choices, your actions. What was our loss...is now your loss also. You will know this as ‘habitat-loss’, you just never thought you would be the losers. So we apologise, but in truth the choice was not ours to make or take – our hand, our paw, our claw, was forced. For when one’s home is taken, where else should one go...?”

CHRIS: (loudly dismissively) Hold on, hold on! (the myth scene freezes) *It talks?*

THE MYTH SCENE DISAPPEARS IN AN INSTANT – AS IF PUNCTURED

JOOLS: Here we go! Maybe you should have taken a sickie.
JAY: (defensively) I thought it made a sort of... sense to have them talk.
TERRY: Of course it talks – it’s a myth!
JAY: Look, it’s going to be the way we find out how our actions impact on the rest of the world. It’s obvious. It needs to speak.
SAM: It’s good stuff. I like it.
CHRIS: It *couldn’t happen* though.
JOOLS: I don’t believe it.
ALEX: What!?
TERRY: That’s true, of course, you’re right, it couldn’t happen. And Icarus couldn’t really fly to the sun with wings made of feathers and wax. That couldn’t actually happen either.

CHRIS: Who?
ALEX: Icarus. He flew too close to the sun. It's pretty famous.
CHRIS: Ah but, did he really – I mean *really*?
JOOLS: (blankly, baffled) No – it's a myth.
CHRIS: There you are then.
JOOLS: But that was the point.
CHRIS: And that was mine!

A MOMENT OF BAFFLEMENT

ALEX: (referring back to the story) Well I like it.
SAM: It works because the thing about climate change is that the 'change' bit happens slowly, bit by bit, day by day, doesn't it?
CHRIS: So?
SAM: So, over a lifetime, all those small changes amount to something. My grandad always talks about the birds which used to be around which are gone now, fish he'd see in seaside harbours which have almost totally vanished.
CHRIS: And?
SAM: And? Well if all that happened in a single day, those homeless creatures coming to our doors, we'd notice, we'd take action, there'd be an outcry it'd be a crisis.
JOOLS: There would be questions in parliament.
SAM: Exactly.
TERRY: There's a thing isn't there, about frogs?
ALEX: Frogs?
TERRY: If you put a frog in boiling water it'll jump out.
ALEX: So would I.
TERRY: But if you put it in cool water and heat it up and up and up, it'll just sit there...just like we're just sitting here, getting hotter and hotter.
ALEX: And the frogs?
TERRY: Boil.
ALEX: Oh!? That's horrible.
JAY: It's disgusting.
CHRIS: It's rubbish.
TERRY: It's what they say.

CHRIS: Well what they say is rubbish. (emphatically) The frog jumps out. It's a fact – even if you heat the water slowly!

TERRY: (after a thought) How would you know...?

A PAUSE, DURING WHICH THEY ALL HAVE THE SAME THOUGHT, THEN ALL

HEADS TURN TO CHRIS

CHRIS: (defensive) What!?

ALEX: (in disbelief) You haven't!?

CHRIS: What!?

JAY: You have?

CHRIS: What's it to you?

JOOLS: That's animal cruelty that is!

CHRIS: Except, like I said, that the frog jumps out!

JOOLS: Oh! That's horrible.

TERRY: You're disgusting.

CHRIS: Oh, great – so I'm wrong when I don't take an interest in your precious 'climate change', and I'm wrong when I do – that's just great that is!

SAM: Maybe we should move on.

TERRY: Disgusting.

CHRIS: (angering) Watch it!

SAM: (trying to regain control) Please!

JOOLS: (to Chris, coldly) I tell you what... I'm looking forward to yours.

CHRIS: Mine'll be good – I know what's it's all about. I've got it sussed.

TERRY: Look, can we have a break? Is that ok?

JAY: Well, that was all I'd got to anyway – wasn't sure where to take it after that.

SAM: (encouragingly) It was really good though. We're really getting somewhere. Let's have a drink from the machine and a toilet break and some fresh air.

CHRIS: Yeah, it's so hot in here....I can't breathe...

SAM: (ignoring Chris) Then we'll carry on – (as they wander off) this is good stuff – who's next...?

TERRY: Me. It might be a bit *bleak*.

SAM: We'll see.

CHRIS: (mocking, almost under the breath) 'Let's take a break' – 'then we'll carry on'!? Who made you the boss...? (exits)

'MYTH' MODE TAKES OVER THE STAGE

MYTH VOICE 4: *For the longest time it had all gone so well – for a time before anyone could ever remember, things had been in balance. What was given was taken, fair exchange, no robbery. But slowly, so slowly, things had changed. And few realised quite how bad the situation had become.*

MYTH VOICE 3: *The earth had been happy to allow all the creatures to enjoy her fruits – forage her forests and live in her protected parts. She knew that, in the grand scheme, all worked out well – for none took more than they needed and there was room and food and shelter for all those who needed it. Those who lived in and on her kept things ticking over very nicely thank you very much.*

MYTH VOICE 2: *But a change came. A change came when one creature, who we shall not name for fear of embarrassing them, decided that it should have not all that it needed, but all that it wanted.*

MYTH VOICE 1: *This was a big change and one that no other creature could fathom, though they too would suffer from the change. The creature who shall not be named strode around the green and blue and beautiful earth and said 'we like that, we shall have it.' Again and again it was said, generation after generation.*

MYTH VOICE 1, 2 & 3: *This – which was once yours, now is ours.*

MYTH VOICE 4, 5 & 6: *You used to live there? So what? We live there now!*

MYTH VOICE 6: *We shall plough this up, build on that, concrete over that, dam this river, flood this plain, dig out those minerals and burn them in furnaces which spew out fumes to clog the blue skies. And those trees – we'll have them too. Those beasts of the land; we will hunt to the corners of the earth, the fish of the sea we will pluck out by the thousand. And we shall use clean, pure, precious drinking water to flush away our foul waste....*

MYTH VOICE 5: *Truly these creatures were monstrous, greedy and selfish. Like a spoiled child of terrifying proportions with unparalleled power.*

MYTH VOICE 4: *The balance was gone, the delicate equilibrium which had lasted so long, existed no more, as the creature which had been part of the grand scheme came to believe that it was the grand scheme. The creature simply became a problem which needed fixing. It was as if the bird which pecks the fleas and ticks from the back of the buffalo, the tiny fish which clean the skin of the mighty whale, suddenly desired to eat the flesh of the host. And this, as we all know, is a most impolite thing to do.*

MYTH VOICE 5: *The sickness started slowly, so slowly the selfish creatures thought that it was just business as normal, and they barely notice rarely took action. But the other creatures did, and they readied themselves for a change. The fever grew in the bipolar earth. She grew hot, she grew cold, she shook, she sweated until she ran dry and sweated again. She could not find comfort in anyway.*

**THE PUPILS BEGIN TO RE-ENTER, TERRY IS TALKING THROUGH THE STORY
AS THEY COME ON**

TERRY & MYTH VOICE 4: And the illness, the sickness, the fever, continued and worsened and deepened. Even in the depths of her disease the earth knew that the only road back to wellness, to balance, to wholeness was to rid herself of the parasite causing the problem.

TERRY: And that's sort of where I've got to...

**AGAIN WE HAVE MOVED FROM MYTH
TO THE REAL WORLD OF THE SCHOOL**

SAM: I love that idea of people, humanity, being like some kind of disease.

TERRY: Like I said, a bit bleak.

JOOLS: Got an end in mind? It needs an end.

TERRY: I was thinking volcanoes, tsunamis, earthquakes, famine, disease, war, crop failure – general death and destruction, then (upbeat) *balance restored*. All fine again, the animals and the plants and the fish are alright – there's just no *us* anymore.

ALEX: Woah...it is quite dark – (hopefully) any room for a song?

TERRY: Not sure. Hadn't thought of that...

CHRIS: (as if revealing the obvious) D'er! It's The Matrix!

TERRY: (after a moment) Sorry?

CHRIS: That idea *isn't new* – it's what Agent Smith says to Morpheus, that people are like a virus.

TERRY: You have to pick holes don't you?

CHRIS: I'm just saying - !

SAM: Lots of stories re-use old ideas. Myths are rarely completely original.

ALEX: An early form of recycling.

CHRIS: (suddenly very articulate) You see, Agent Smith says that during his time here, on earth he's had time to classify the species – us. And then he says he thinks we're not mammals at all because every mammal develops a balance with the environment – but humans don't. He says we move onto an area and consume and multiply until everything is used up and then, to survive, we have to move on to another area. And then he says that the only other thing on earth that does this is a virus – that's cool isn't it, a virus. He says that we are a cancer on this planet, a disease, and he is the cure. (goes into a slow-motion shoot out for a few moments)

SAM: (pleasantly surprised) That was very...articulate.

CHRIS: That's just the cut down version – I know it word for word.

ALEX: The whole speech?

CHRIS: The whole *film, all the parts*.

JAY: You... are.... kidding?

CHRIS: I didn't learn Reloaded or Revolutions though – too boring. (excited) Do you want it from the start?

JAY: No! Enough. We need to crack on.

ALEX: You really mean *the whole film*?

CHRIS: What can I say? I've got talents....

SAM: At least we know you can learn lines.

CHRIS: Only good ones.

JAY: Can we get back to this, please?

JOOLS: Look, we can do ours if you want.

SAM: *Yours?*

ALEX: We've sort of been working on it together.

JOOLS: Well, more *talking through it* than *working on it*. And to be honest, the whole myth thing was a bit hard for me, I wasn't sure how to...what to...it's not really my sort of...

JAY: Fine, I'm sure it will be fine..

JOOLS: And two heads are better than one, and all that.

ALEX: It's a bit – not finished. Not sure if it's what we need.

SAM: Whatever. No worries.

CHRIS: (aside) Will there be a song? Will there be jazz-hands?

SAM: Off you go, what have you got?

ALEX: So last night I got home and, what do you know, my dad had this song on, and it was this woman singing about a big yellow taxi -

TERRY: It comes and takes away her old man?.

JOOLS: You know it? I didn't know it.

TERRY: My Mum sings it when we're in the car.

JOOLS: It's someone called Joan Mitchell.

TERRY: Joni Mitchell.

JOOLS: That's it.

ALEX: But the whole point is that like the man, with nature, you don't know what you've got, what you should treasure, *until it's gone*.

JOOLS: The fact that it's disappeared makes you realise you should have cared for it while you had it.

SAM: Ok?

JOOLS: So that's what we used as our starting point. Downloaded it and read the lyrics...and even though I want to put both sides, this seemed like it was an interesting thing to explore.

ALEX: Yeah, so it got us thinking (this time we shift slowly into the myth as ALEX speaks, as if it is coming into being as the words explain the story) that there might be something in that – in the idea that we destroy things which are special and we don't even realise.

JOOLS: We had this idea for a title of, like, 'Paradise Rock' or 'Eden Rock' – like there's somewhere perfect,

ALEX: - totally beautiful,

JOOLS: - a wonder of nature or something,

ALEX: - and all we can do is put a visitor centre and a shop there and sell trinkets and stuff.

JOOLS: Junk. Tat.

ALEX: Devalue it.

JOOLS: Pave Paradise –

ALEX: Put up a parking lot.

JOOLS: Exactly.

ALEX: So it starts with something perfect.

JOOLS: Pure. Pristine.

ALEX: *A wonder of wonders.*

THE MYTH CAST TAKES OVER THE STORY

MYTH VOICE 3: *And the first to see the wonder of wonders could not believe their luck, could not believe their eyes. They fell to their knees and wept at the beauty of it, they felt they were chosen by some divine hand to see such a spectacle. And as they turned on their heels to tell the world what they had found, the first small delicate plant was crushed underfoot.*

MYTH VOICE 4: *And back they came with more, to show what they had seen. And back they came with more still, to prove what they had seen.*

MYTH VOICE 2: *And they looked on the wonder of wonders, which stretched as far as the eye could see and they said unto themselves:*

MYTH VOICE 5: *If this wonder is to be appreciated, saved, protected, we must make sure as many people know about it as possible.*

MYTH VOICE 1: *We must have a car park here.*

MYTH VOICE 6: *A restaurant here.*

MYTH VOICE 5: *A cable car leading up to here.*

MYTH VOICE 4: *A viewing point with picnic area here.*

MYTH VOICE 3: *A campsite here for those who wish to revel in the wonder of wonder for a few days. A fast-food outlet for those with little time.*

MYTH VOICE 2: *A shop for the campers.*

MYTH VOICE 1: *Electricity points for those in motor homes.*

MYTH VOICE 2: *A generator for the electricity.*

MYTH VOICE 3: *Perhaps an airstrip for our international friends.*

MYTH VOICE 4: *Those from abroad who wish to revel in the wonder of wonders.*

MYTH VOICE 5: *We will make money from the wonder which we will, of course, spend on protection – no expense shall be spared, all charitable donations welcome.*

MYTH VOICE 6: *And they dug and they cleared and they created the wonder of wonders in their own image, and the visitors came and went and came and went. The planes landed on the tarmac runway and the planes took off in the same manner. And when visitors realised it did not anymore stretch as far as the eye could see, when they realised it was just a wonder, merely a remnant, a pale shadow of a wonder of wonders, they could always buy the book from the gift shop which showed what it had all been like before.*

MYTH VOICE 3: *And they drove off with their books and bags and burgers and baseball caps and models and stickers and playing cards and key-rings and postcards and posters and lunchboxes. And everyone, everyone, bought their stick of Paradise Rock, to prove that they had been.*

**A VERY DOWNBEAT SILENCE, THE 'MYTH' CAST SLOWLY DISSIPATE.
THE FOCUS FALLS AGAIN ON THE STUDENTS**

TERRY: That's... really sad.

SAM: It's like from the moment it was found, it was doomed. It could only be saved by being left alone.

JAY: Well, none of these stories are going to be, exactly, *upbeat*.

ALEX: I was thinking of a song, to finish it off. Offer a little bit of...*hope*.

CHRIS: (breaking the mood) Oh come on! I mean... it's just miserable isn't it?
'Come and slash your wrists at our Green Day!'

JOOLS: (sharply) Look, couldn't you just come back next week when you're properly well again.

CHRIS: Shut up.

JOOLS: (sarcastically) Just thinking of you.

ALEX: (a little apologetically) It was only an idea!

CHRIS: Not much of an idea.

TERRY: (mocking) Well, not to worry, because I'm sure yours will be just great!

SAM: In fact why don't we go on to yours, see what you've got to offer.
If you're ready?

CHRIS: (defensive) I'm ready.
 JOOLS: We're all ready.
 TERRY: As long as it's not a copy of The Matrix.
 CHRIS: Don't you worry.
 JOOLS: Away you go.
 CHRIS: All right, all right!
 TERRY: This should be good.
 JOOLS: You reckon?
 CHRIS: (suddenly defensive) Mine's quite... simple –
 TERRY: What a surprise.
 SAM: Hey now, come on....'simple' can be good.
 ALEX: I like 'simple'... sometimes.
 CHRIS: (uncomfortable) And it's, sort of, based on an old story.
 TERRY: (under their breath) But not The Matrix...
 ALEX: But like we said, 're-cycling' ideas is all right.
 SAM: (to Chris) That's ok, just tell it.
 CHRIS: Right – right...here we go then -

**THE MYTH STARTS, BUT HALTINGLY, UNCERTAINLY,
 THIS TIME QUITE BADLY ACTED**

MYTH VOICE 5: *Once upon a time there were two friends.*
 MYTH VOICE 1: *Day after day the two saw each other, in the street, by the market,
 the... turtle*
 MYTH VOICE 6: *...and the... rabbit.*
 MYTH VOICE 2: *And each day the rabbit said to the turtle: 'I bet if we had a race, I'd
 win, because I am fast and you are slow!'*
 TERRY: (interrupting, the MYTH CAST freeze) You're kidding?!
 SAM: Give it a chance.
 CHRIS: Oi! Quiet – I didn't interrupt yours.
 JOOLS: You did actually! And I notice that your animals talk too!
 JAY: Well this is going well...
 CHRIS: Just shut up! I'm doing my best!
 ALEX: Please, just be nice eh?
 SAM: Yeah, come on... quiet.

THE MYTH STARTS AGAIN, UNCONVINCINGLY

MYTH VOICE 4: *And the turtle said: 'Don't be so sure, young fellow-me-lad! You might be surprised that... if we had a race...I might win...it'.*

MYTH VOICE 3: *And so it came to pass that the race was...on.*

ALL MYTH VOICES: *And along came the day of the...race and everyone from...animal-land...was there to see...it.*

ALEX: Can I ask a question? (the myth immediately freezes)

CHRIS: (crossly) What?

ALEX: Forgive me, but...this *is* just 'The Hare and the Tortoise' isn't it?

CHRIS: Ah, well now – clever clogs, if you were concentrating, you'd see, actually, that it's 'The Rabbit and the Turtle'.

JOOLS: And that's different?

CHRIS: D'er! Yeah.

TERRY: (aside to the others) Turtles live in water for a start, so it'll be an interesting race.

SAM: Look, I know I might be judging this before I know all about it, but I think it might be worth asking, before we go any further – does this have a message at all?

CHRIS: The message is; (very meaningfully) sometimes... slow things... win...races.

SAM: And can I ask, without being discouraging, whether that helps us get across the whole 'climate change, recycle, re-use, low-impact' message at all?

THEY ALL LOOK AT CHRIS

CHRIS: (after a very long pause, trying to think if it does) No.

JOOLS: Ok, good, so at least we didn't sit through the whole thing.

TERRY: Not as if we don't know what happens in the end.

CHRIS: Hold on! I sat through your whingey-whiney-gothy thing! And I came up with something – I tried!

TERRY: (getting angry) Oh, yeah, so I'm a Goth, that's really clever. I've never heard that before. Do I look like one?

CHRIS: You sound like one.

TERRY: Oh that's just great, that's fantastic! So anyone who doesn't bung up their eyes and ears, anyone who gives a toss, anyone who thinks seriously

about these issues, and feels that we should sit up and take notice - we're all Goths are we?

CHRIS: I reckon.

ALEX: That's not fair now, come on.

JOOLS: Hey this is really getting us somewhere – this is great!

JAY: We are losing time by doing this – I just thought I'd mention that...!

CHRIS: (to Jools) And you are giving me a headache – it comes on with stress and anxiety!

JOOLS: 'Stress and anxiety' – it's only Tuesday! Imagine how stressed and anxious we can be by the end of the week. We've barely scratched the surface.

CHRIS: It's all right for you -

SAM: Please, everyone...(trying to calm the situation) ...please! Listen, let's calm down, shall we. Now (to Chris) remember when you said you wanted our activity for this week to be a litter-pick at the park?

CHRIS: Yeah?

SAM: I'm beginning to think that, actually, might be *really helpful*, to prepare for the Green Day.

ALEX: (realising this would be a good chance to get rid of CHRIS) Yeah, get the place looking nice.

JOOLS: That's true, it would be a useful contribution...

CHRIS: Yeah right.

JOOLS: Honestly.

CHRIS: (mocking) Oh, *honestly!*?

JAY: (trying to sound upbeat) No, listen, listen, you see perhaps you could make a log, a chart, of what was there, how much rubbish, how many bags, how many different recyclables, that sort of thing...all of those stats, all of that information could be useful, if we did some calculations and projected in across the town, the country, the world, that would be really valuable.

CHRIS: You know what, I see your mouth move, but all I'm hearing is 'go away'.

SAM: (unconvincingly) No, no, no.. we just think that your..(tries to find the words)... talents and energies might be best used by –

CHRIS: (angered and occasionally looking a little pained and overheated during this speech) You know what? You know what!? Stick your fables and stupid stories. Shove your myths and your miserable, depressing shoe-gazing! All you're doing is making hot air, lots of it. If that's good for the planet then great! Hoo-bloody-rah! Big fat bully-for-you! Do you know what, do you know what...? I *will* do my litter pick, I'll do it, and I'll do it well, and do you know why – because even though you'll look down on it, look down on me, even though you think I'm stupid, it'll be the one useful thing this group does this week. So, right, you can turn that into a myth and tell it to the world for all I care! I'm done, I'm off! (grabs a bag and walks out)

AN AWKWARD PAUSE FROM THE REST OF THE GROUP, FREEZE

SCENE EIGHT: AT THE PARK

TREE 1, 2 & 3: (as if picking up something in the air) Action. Someone is taking action. Someone has had enough.

TREE 1: Someone is misunderstood, ignored, sidelined. To down-tools, to walk out is not action our kind can take, ours is not the momentary gesture, not the flare & flourish of the farewell.

TREE 2: But perhaps two can become one, perhaps the moment is right for one to amplify another, for two, as one, to speak more loudly, more clearly, more articulately than either could alone...

TREE 3: Can it be done or is it merely the stuff of myth, perhaps all I need is the closeness, the moment, the rarity of an open mind and a hint of righteous rage.

TREE 1, 2 & 3: Perhaps... perhaps...

CHRIS: (entering, calling angrily towards the school, though no-one can hear) I'm telling you, this is it for me, this is all you're getting, this is all I'm doing! I'm doing this then I'm going home, going to get in bed, close the curtains and watch all the Matrixes right through, you see if I don't! And do you know what – that'll be the best way to spend this week, do something that's actually useful and then duck out early – fill a bag with rubbish and sod off

to bed. You tell your little stories, you set up your stall with facts and figures and see what it does – me, I'll be the one actually making a difference to this (looks around, disheartened and a little breathless) – place. Jesus, what a mess.

TREE 1: What a mess indeed – but you, as you say, can make a difference.

CHRIS SILENTLY LOOKS AROUND AS IF HEARING SOMETHING

(with surprise) *Well I never* – can it be? A connection made, a gap... bridged.

CHRIS: (resolutely) It might take ages, but I'll sort it, I'll do it!

TREE 2: The doors of perception open, the planets in alignment...

TREE 3: ...the moment is now.

AGAIN, CHRIS LOOKS AS IF FEELING A PRESENCE

CHRIS: (unnerved) Maybe it's too hot to do this today...?

TREE 1, 2 & 3: (gently, urging) No..

CHRIS: No, no. I'll do it now, I said I would, so I will, or they'll think I just gave up. (looks about) There's a few bags to fill, that's for sure. (beginning to plan ahead) I'll have to get them first, we've got loads in the kitchen drawer, and then lug them home when they're full I guess. (takes stock) I'll probably knacker myself doing this...

TREE 1, 2 & 3: (tempting) Then rest.

CHRIS: But I'll do it, all of it. I'll show them.

TREE 1, 2 & 3: (more urgently) Rest.

CHRIS: But maybe first I'll just – sort of -

TREE 1, 2, 3 & CHRIS: Rest.

CHRIS: Yeah, I'll rest, just for a few minutes, just get my breath, cool down a bit, clear my head. I'll rest on... (looks about) ...not that bench, that's for sure, then on... on...

TURNS & LOOKS AT THE TREE

Yeah, (approaching) *you'll do*.

TREE 3: Look at the way one can see when one but takes the time, with eyes anew, sights afresh are laid before...

CHRIS: (looking closely at the tree) You're a rough old thing aren't you, no place to rest a head there.

TREE 2: You who has seen me on so many days, see me now as if for the first time. Can it happen, can worlds collide...?

CHRIS: (spotting some letters) Who's been carving in you eh? (coming closer)
What does that say?

TREE 1: Do not look – touch.

CHRIS: Can't quite make it out, so old.

TREE 1, 2 & 3: Touch.

CHRIS: Some old lovers initials and a heart, I reckon. It goes so deep. That's history that is, right there...

TREE 1, 2 & 3: *Touch.*

CHRIS: Like a wound – right in.

TREE 1, 2 & 3: (as the hand reaches the TREE) Yes!

A SUDDEN CHANGE IN EVERYTHING, LIGHTS, SOUND ETC –

**A PARADE OF OVERLAPPING IMAGES FROM THE HISTORY OF THE TREE
(ACTED BY THE MYTH CAST OR PROJECTED) APPEARS TO CHRIS WHO
CANNOT PULL AWAY FROM THE TREE. THE SWIRL OF ACTIVITY GETS MORE
FRENETIC UNTIL FINALLY CHRIS IS ALMOST THROWN FROM THE TREE. THE
'CARNIVAL OF HISTORY' DISAPPEARS IN A MOMENT, AND CHRIS IS LEFT,
SHOCKED & BREATHLESS...**

CHRIS: (after a few moments, very slowly, looks back at the tree) You - are -
kidding...!

SCENE NINE

BACK AT THE SCHOOL, THE OTHERS ARE BUSY ORGANISING THEMSELVES

JOOLS: So who will be in charge of the information desk, and what happens when that person needs a break? We need to think about these things – the last thing we want to happen is that we end up looking amateurish, or like a bunch of school kids. I think perhaps we should have two sides, a pro and an anti, and people can go from one to the other and see where they 'fit'. Maybe we could have something on the floor, like a ruler, and they can put themselves on it to show how concerned, how convinced they are.

ALEX: I'm not sure...

TERRY: And I'm not sure about the stories.

JAY: Me neither.

JOOLS: Oh come on, there's no time for all that.

SAM: They're nice, but they're not the stuff of myth, really are they?

TERRY: We need something like 'girl sees statue weep tears of blood' don't we?

JAY: That gets attention.

TERRY: Every time.

JAY: That's a classic, a winner.

SAM: People would actually come to see that.

JAY: They do.

TERRY: Look at Lourdes.

ALEX: Madonna's daughter *weeps blood?!?*

TERRY: I don't believe this – I just don't believe it!

JOOLS: You do realise we are running out of time on this though – every hour we spend talking about it is an hour we spend not doing it. We haven't got long. All we're doing is talking – we need to crack on.

SAM: But we need to get it right.

JOOLS: But we need to get it done!

ALEX: What if this weather doesn't hold, what if it's tipping down on the day – have we got a wet-weather option?

JOOLS: What about having a choice of myths?

TERRY: More than one story?

JOOLS: No, having one of our stories, and having a section which asks 'is the whole idea of global warming, of climate crisis, a myth in itself'?

SAM: What?

JAY: The science is pretty clear on the facts.

JOOLS: But facts can be interpreted differently can't they, you can pick and choose which facts you use...

JAY: I don't think there are any facts which point away from the whole idea of a climate crisis!

JOOLS: But do they point towards it being man-made, or a natural occurrence.

ALEX: I'm lost now. Is that part of the brief...!?

SAM: (ignoring this) No, no. Listen - this is all getting too...too... (can't think of the word) We need the facts and the figures, yes. And we need them to be honest and clear, yes. But we need one really good myth to tell, to stick in

people's minds – and I don't think we've quite got it yet. The thing is I think we'll know it when we see it.

PUPIL : What?

SAM: The right story, the right myth. One of us will come up with something and things will just click, and we'll be on our way. Things will fall into place then.

TERRY: You hope.

SAM: Yes, I hope. It's not like I've done this before.

JOOLS: But you think we'll know it when we see it.

SAM: I do yes!

JAY: So we trust that something better will come up, instead of cracking on with what we've got?

SAM: I think we should just give it a little longer to 'settle' in our heads. First ideas aren't always the best ideas.

A GENERAL HUBUB ENSUES, QUITE FRACTUOUS & TENSE

INTO THIS CHRIS WALKS IN AND SITS, STILL LOOKING DAZED & CONFUSED

JOOLS: (after a moment of quiet from the whole group) You're back then? And so soon!?

TERRY: I thought you were off for good.

JOOLS: To what do we owe this re-appearance...?

SAM: Well I'm glad you're back.

ALEX: The whole team, together again – that's nice.

JAY: You look awful.

CHRIS: Now, all of you, all of you, just shh – don't say anything. Just listen, this is important. It's really important, that just for now, just for a minute – you just shut up and listen. I need to get this out, I need to tell you this, and you need to hear it. Give me a moment.

TERRY: Ok.

CHRIS: No – words! No words. I mean it, I need to get this out, in the right way, and I need you to just – shut...up. Thank you. (after a pause) So...I left you, what, a couple of hours ago right? And I went to the park, right, like I said I would. Like I planned.

ALEX: Are you ok?

CHRIS: Shut – up!

ALEX: Sorry.

CHRIS: Stop it! (silence) Right...so...I'm thinking that I'm hot and flustered and hassled and headachy and all that, but I'm still thinking about how to tackle the job, the clean up, what I need to do, what I need to get. And I'm thinking to myself and I'm slowly, sort of thinking that I'm not alone, but it's just me, standing by the tree, you know, the big one, the massive one?

LIGHTS UP SLOWLY ON THE TREE

And suddenly it's like I notice it for the first time, suddenly like it's just got there or something, even though I know I see it most days...and I see that there's some initials carved into it, way old, like *old old*. But to be honest, I don't think I've ever looked close enough to notice. And the weird thing is that I know, *well I think I know* that I need to touch it. The tree the bark, those carved initials. And slowly...slowly... and gently – I do.

And then...

TREE 1, 2 & 3: (whispering) And then...

CHRIS: Me..

TREE 1, 2 & 3: And the tree..

BOTH: Were one.

CHRIS: I was...

TREE 1, 2 & 3: Drawn into it.

BOTH: Couldn't escape from it.

CHRIS: And I know this sounds, weird, sounds mad. Believe me, I know. (slowly, earnestly) But I saw what the tree sees.

TREE 1, 2 & 3: What the tree has seen.

CHRIS: Like all jumbled up, like memories, like old photos in a box all spilled out on the floor, but from way back –

TREE 1, 2 & 3: Way back.

BOTH: Way back.

CHRIS: Before pictures, photos – I saw the history that the tree has seen, since it was small. The people it has known, the forest turned to field then to roads, houses, factories. Skies without a plane in them, no rumble of traffic. I felt how the tree breathes in what we breathe out, how there was a balance there...and how there was a tipping point when things...went too far. And it was all so...so..

TREE 1: Concentrated...

TREE 2: ...condensed...

TREE 3: ...crystallised...

CHRIS: And I felt like I was there for hours, days, time just stood still – meant nothing, was gone.

TREE 1, 2 & 3: Not gone, just my time, not your time.

CHRIS: And I understood. I saw – clearly, with new eyes –

TREE 1, 2 & 3: My eyes –

CHRIS: - what has been happening, here, right here, and everywhere. What we've been doing to this place, the whole place, how its changed because of us, like you've all been saying, how we've built over things, chopped things down, trashed the place, used it up, worn it out, concreted over it – disrespected it. And it can't go on. I saw it...

TREE 1 & CHRIS: ...hundreds of years...

TREE 2: ... so many hundreds of years

CHRIS: I saw it all. I *was the tree*...

TREE 3: ...and the tree...

CHRIS: ...was me.

SILENCE

(after waiting for a response) *Now* you can speak.

SAM: (after a long pause) Now *that* is a story!

ALEX: I like it. Classic 'myth' stuff!

SAM: I told you didn't I? We'd know it when we saw it.

JOOLS: Fair point – (to Chris) who'd have thought you'd come up with a decent story – but that is good.

CHRIS: 'Story'?

TERRY: 'Story' – 'myth', 'fable', whatever – it's really good. Even I have to admit that. We can certainly spread that like 'girls sees weeping statue'.

CHRIS: Statue?

JOOLS: It's got legs.

CHRIS: Legs?

ALEX: I guess you just needed time to mull on it. It is really good – weird but good.

TERRY: Using the tree as the focus for it is really strong. It's a good...device. A mechanism for telling the story.

CHRIS: *Device!? Mechanism!?* You think I'm making it up?

ALEX: (ignoring Chris) I think it's great! I think you've done really well – you should be proud.

SAM: We shouldn't waste any time now. If everyone agrees, we should start spreading the word about it – every way we can, get the word out. What did you say – it was something about how you saw what the tree sees?

JAY: It's genius.

ALEX: Lovely idea.

CHRIS: Idea? Idea! Story! You don't get it!

SAM: I think we get it well enough to start spreading it.

JOOLS: Can we get moving on it now please!

CHRIS: You – don't – get – it.

SAM: We should use everything, text people, email them, message them on any sites you've got a profile on. If we play it right, we could really make people believe all over the place that this *actually happened*.

JAY: That is good!

THEY ALL EXIT, CHATting EXCITEDLY, EXCEPT CHRIS

CHRIS: (following) Myth..?! Story!? No, no...hold on...!

SAM RETURNS

SAM: Are you coming?

CHRIS: Listen to me, you really don't get it. It's not just a story – I was there, I felt it, it happened. I saw it.

SAM: And that's what we'll tell people, don't worry.

CHRIS: But I'm telling you. Were you even listening to me.

SAM: You don't need to pretend to us – it's a great myth and we'll spread it far and wide.

CHRIS: Pretend? You think this is me pretending? You weren't there...

SAM: (a little concerned) Listen...whatever happened to you up there, stress, anxiety, heatstroke – it gave your imagination a hell of a jolt, jump-started you.

CHRIS: Stress, anxiety...?

SAM: What you have come up with is vivid, intense, believable in a way none of ours were – it sounds like you’ve almost convinced yourself. And if we have your migraine or the heat to thank for that, then that’s fine by me. You should get home and get some rest. And *whatever happened*, it got the job done. We’ve got what we need. Come on... (exits)

CHRIS: Whatever happened...? *It* happened, don’t you get it...(calling to the emptiness) IT HAPPENED!

A SUDDEN CHANGE IN TONE

SCENE TEN: THE FOLLOWING SHOULD APPEAR LIKE A MONTAGE OF MEDIA INTEREST, DIFFERENT CHANNELS, DIFFERENT MEDIA

PRESENTER 1: (as if facing a camera) And finally in tonight’s regional round-up, a local youth claims to have had a mystical experience involving one of the oldest trees in the area. The pupil says that they were preparing for a ‘green day’ to raise awareness of environmental issues when the ancient tree, seemed to be willing them to ‘make contact’. Our reporter is on the scene, with the tree in question – any strange happenings at the park tonight?

REPORTER 1: (speaking as if on location) Well it’s all pretty quiet down here now, but I’ve been talking to a few of the locals, and it would seem that opinion is split on quite what has happened here.... Some of these youth gathered around me say they play on this patch of ground day in day out and have failed to notice anything unusual about the tree in question. But others say don’t be too quick to judge and, that as the great man said “*There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.*” The only thing that’s sure is that interest for what would otherwise be a small, local event has spread like wildfire – we’ll just have to see how things unfold. And now, as Shakespeare never said, not even once – it’s back to you in the studio.

**ELSEWHERE ONSTAGE, A DJ SITS WITH HEADPHONES ON, SPEAKS AS IF
INTO A MIC, THE CALLERS WAIT ON TELEPHONES IN SEPARATE AREAS OF
THE STAGE**

- DJ: So don't forget that you can call with your requests to the usual number, twenty four hours a day, please keep those calls coming in. And now the next subject on our phone-in is the strange goings on down at the old park on the edge of town– there's quite heated debate about this both locally and on the net, with people coming down on both sides of the divide it seems – so: *deeply significant other-worldly happenings, or attention-seeking teens taking us for a ride* – let us know your thoughts. On the phones now we have Sam who has lived by the recreational ground in question for more than thirty years and Nat who claims to have a unique perspective on this kind of thing. Sam, if I can come to you first; *marvellous miracle or horrible hoax.*
- SAM: In my view this all goes back to not having capital punishment in schools.
- DJ: Well, Sam, lets hope that you mean corporal punishment, otherwise you'd be calling for our young people to be executed!
- SAM: Well, whatever it is, for some of them, well it's too good for them – there's no respect, it's all F-this and F-that and it didn't happen in my day!
- DJ: I'm sensing some cynicism there Sam, can you shed any light on this Nat.
- NAT: My view and the view of all of the white witch community is that all living things, you, me, animals and yes even trees –
- DJ: Even Sam?
- NAT: Even Sam, we all have an energy, a power, a spiritual and very natural, vital life force coursing through us. And I think it's perfectly reasonable to believe that a young person has, quite by chance found a way to tap into that force.
- SAM: Rubbish – complete rubbish!
- NAT: I myself have had many extraordinary experiences with trees.
- SAM: I bet you have! I bet you have...
- DJ: And I believe that we've just been joined by one of our local GP's who wants to chip in with a related thought. I believe it's Dr Horner from The Abbey surgery, what would you like to bring to the table Dr Horner.

DOCTOR: Well I think there's an element here that everyone is underestimating...

DJ: And what's that?

DOCTOR: Well, I don't think we can underestimate the role of heatstroke, sunstroke and dehydration in this story. Remember how hot the last week has been.

DJ: Really? That's really a factor?

DOCTOR: Oh, very much so. It's a well-known phenomenon that heat, sun, lack of good hydration can cause everything from fainting to feverish visions.

DJ: 'Visions', you say?

DOCTOR: Absolutely. I think this is a very plain case of a medical situation being blown up into something much more – supernatural, mystical.

NAT: But what if it is mystical Doctor, what about that?

SAM: And what about if it's just some young lout having a laugh at the expense of us, the law-abiding taxpayer.

DOCTOR: I think there's a need for us all to be as rational as possible, to look at the facts with clear heads.

NAT: And closed minds Doctor, is that right?

SAM: And let this young layabout get away with pulling the wool over our eyes...!?

NAT: 'Layabout'? What are you talking about?

DOCTOR: You see, where's the rational discussion...?

THEY ALL FADE

DJ: I'll have to stop you all there – but do drop us a line by text or by the usual email address, let me tell you that we've got people from all over the country chipping in on this increasingly fascinating tale...

FOCUS FALLS ON A DIFFERENT TV PRESENTER

PRESENTER 2: And finally, who would have thought that just a few short days ago, the claim of a single local teenager would have caused such a fuss and furore? It seems that in this day and age of social networking and 24 hour news stations, there's no such thing a 'local' any more. This story, true or false, is being followed across the globe. Well, tomorrow is the day that everyone's been waiting for, the day where the pupil and a number of other local students stage their *green day*. People have already started camping out at the site, there's a contingent of strong religious believers

and a number of environmental activists who are all aiming to gain some sort of enlightenment or political advantage out of this story. Everyone from child psychiatrists to the forestry commission have all had something to say about this strange occurrence and it seems that tomorrow is the day which will see this story 'put down roots' or 'wither on the vine'. Our roving reporter is there with the growing number of people from near and far who are keeping vigil and hoping that this tale is one which will continue to 'branch out' in new directions. How's it looking there...?

REPORTER 2: We've got candlelight, we've got a small ragged band of hardy campers, we have vans selling burgers and ice creams and we've got, of course, someone playing a guitar in the background. There's quite a festival atmosphere here, all very good natured, even from those who think this is nothing but a publicity stunt that got way, way out of hand. The telling thing about this is how it has ceased to be a small, local event and become something of a media scrum, a feeding frenzy – I can see the satellite dishes of a number of major news outlets at the roadside over there – for once our little patch of the world is under the spotlight, the attention of the world is pointed at our own back yard! Quite how long they stay after the midday opening of this fabled 'green day' remains to be seen....

BEFORE THE SCENE CLOSES, WE HEAR VOICES IN FRENCH, GERMAN, ITALIAN, SPANISH ETC, ALL BEGINNING TO TELL THE STORY TO THEIR RESPECTIVE NEWS STATIONS, EG:

INTERNATIONAL PRESENTERS: Welcome, from the outskirts of a medium sized town here in the UK. I am standing on a local playing field where a large and ancient tree has become the focus of world attention. It appears that something of a mystical revelation, an environmental epiphany, happened right here in this rather normal looking place...

THE 'EURO-VOICES' COMBINE AND BUILD UNTIL THEY ARE UNINTELLIGIBLE, THEN FALL SUDDENLY SILENT

SCENE ELEVEN: SATURDAY

THE PUPILS ARE HUDDLED, AS IF NERVOUSLY PREPARING TO OPEN THE DAY

SAM: (as if finalising plans) Right, now, is everything in place – have we all done everything on our list?

JAY: I tried, but my list did keep getting longer and longer.

SAM: Well none of us expected it to work this well did we?

JOOLS: You call this working well? Have you seen the people out there?

SAM: If they weren't here, we'd have failed – we've got a chance to get the message across – it's worked beyond our wildest dreams.

JAY: And it was you who wanted debate – you certainly got that!

TERRY: And when they hear that it's all a load of rubbish dreamed up by us to raise the profile..?

SAM: (a little desperately) It's not rubbish – it's...

TERRY: A myth, an allegory, a fable. (mocking) Oh yes...I'm sure they'll see the subtle difference.

JOOLS: And where is the star of the show, the hero of the day? Under the duvet again – I can't say we've had great help from the person who kicked all this off.

JAY: Frankly – the best place for Chris is out of the spotlight. Too much chatting to the media would have made all this crumble days ago, just as it was going global.

JOOLS: Leaving us doing all the work – great.

SAM: Come on, we've only got a few hours left of this – and I think we can say we'll get a good mark –

TERRY: If we don't get lynched! Hounded out of town...

SAM: So let's try to keep it together and get through this, and even try to enjoy it a little, we won't get this profile again. We're famous!

JOOLS: (dismissively) For fifteen minutes.

CHRIS WALKS ON, SEEMINGLY A VERY DIFFERENT PERSON

ALEX: (noticing Chris) Look!

TERRY: Who'd have thought it...

JOOLS: (to Chris) Well I've lost my little bet then, I was prepared to put money on you not showing.

CHRIS: (calmly) I said I'd be here.

SAM: I'm glad you came, but feel free to just take a back seat.

CHRIS: I'll take whichever seat I like.

JAY: Ok.

CHRIS: Remember when you said, 'no leaders, no slackers, a team'?

SAM: Yes?

CHRIS: Well then, you're not the leader, so don't tell me to take a back seat.

TERRY: It could be argued that you have been something of a slacker though, we've barely seen you this week – very helpful.

CHRIS: I've been...

JOOLS: What...watching The Matrix in bed.

CHRIS: No!

TERRY: Where have you been?

CHRIS: (earnestly) I can't even begin to tell you where I've been.

ALEX: Migraine?

CHRIS: No, that I could deal with...no. I've been – never mind. You wouldn't understand.

ALEX: (sympathetically) I might.

CHRIS: Trust me, you wouldn't. No one does.

SAM: Now if people ask you about the, how do I put this...

JAY: (mocking) 'Mystical experience'.

JOOLS: (smirking) 'Supernatural intervention'.

SAM: (as if reprimanding them) Thanks... if they ask you about the 'event' then perhaps you might like to just...keep...

CHRIS: 'Quiet'? Is that what I might like to do – is that what this member of the 'team' might like to do?

SAM: It just might be better.

CHRIS: Trust me, if I knew what to say or how to say it, I would, and I wouldn't be saying it - or not saying it - to please you.

SAM: Ok.

JAY: I hate to point this out, but it's almost midday.

ALEX: No backing out now I suppose?

TERRY: Let's just dive in and get it done.

SAM: (a little nervously) Yes. Right! Showtime!

**THEY PREPARE TO FACE THE CROWD,
LEAVING CHRIS & ALEX HANGING BACK**

ALEX: (gently) You really don't look well. Are you ok?

CHRIS: And what, you *care*...?

ALEX: Well, actually...yes. Shouldn't I? You are part of our team, after all.

CHRIS: (a bit abashed) Sorry. Thanks. It's just...well, my world has been sort of turned upside down...but –

ALEX: Perhaps you shouldn't have come up with such a good story, such an effective myth.

CHRIS: (irritated) You see! 'Story - myth', that's all I've heard this week. But listen, what would you think if I told you that I actually thought it happened though, what about that eh? And what if it happened to you – how would you be then...?

ALEX: (gently) Listen, whatever you think happened up there –

CHRIS: 'Whatever I think'? At first I knew – *knew*...absolutely. And it did my head in, but then with all this talk, all these opinions going backwards and forwards, people telling me what happened - *telling me*. And suddenly I wasn't so sure, maybe it was heatstroke, sunstroke, some crazy fever thing...

ALEX: Well it'll all calm down after today. Then maybe it'll make more sense, then maybe you'll know for good and for real that it (trying to be sensitive) didn't... actually... happen.

CHRIS: The trouble is, I'm not sure if I'd rather know that it didn't happen - or I'd rather know, really know, that it did. Part of me wishes none of this happened at all, and part of me -

SAM: (calling back to them) Come on you two – we have to start!

A CHANGE OF TONE, EXCITED CHATTING AS THE CROWD ENTER AND TAKE UP PLACES WITHIN THE AUDIENCE.

THE PUPILS LINE UP TO OPEN THE DAY, THE TREE IN THE BACKGROUND

SAM: (after getting the crowd to settle down) Thanks to all of you for coming today, thanks for showing so much interest in this event. We're really pleased with the turn out. It started out as something small, something to just raise awareness, something we needed to do for school, but I guess it's grown into something we never expected. Maybe we should have.

JAY: Now, today there will be lots of chances for you to learn about the facts and figure about the issues we're raising, and lots of chances for you to find out small ways in which we can all make a difference.

ALEX: Our view is that if each of us take some responsibility for at least one thing after today, one small change in all our lives, then that's a step in the right direction.

TERRY: Even something as small as composting, as buying food more locally, more seasonally, can make a difference.

JOOLS: It's all about choices – we make choices every day, and we believe that the better those choices, the better it will be for the environment.

CROWD 1: Oh, come on...

CROWD 2: I didn't camp out all night for this...

CROWD 3: Yeah. Tell us, which one of you had 'the experience'?

JOOLS: Ah, yes, the...experience.

TERRY: Obviously there's be a lot of talk about that....phenomenon...

JAY: (trying to deflect the issue) I think maybe we shouldn't dwell too much on that aspect of the event –

CROWD 2: Which of you was it?

CROWD 1: That's the one, there, on the end...

CROWD 3: Was it you, are you the one...?

JOOLS: That part of the day isn't really where our focus should be...

TERRY: You see, one of the things we wanted to do was try to invent a story –

CROWD 4: 'Invent'?

CROWD 3: 'Story'?

CROWD 6: Are you saying it was a lie?

JOOLS: Ah. (thinking quickly) 'Invent' is the wrong word – 'develop' might be better.

TERRY: Yeah, we wanted to develop a story, a myth, a new sort of folk-tale...

CROWD 5: You're kidding!

CROWD 6: I came all the way here for this?

CROWD 3: I knew this was a sham.

CROWD 4: It's ok for those of us who knew you were just stringing us along, but what are you going to say to the saddo's who had faith in you, eh?

CROWD 6: Hey, watch it you!

JAY: (trying to calm the situation) Please...please! There's lots to learn today, loads of things to take away with you, groups to join. Facts and figures which we hope will make you think about the subject -

CROWD 3: (to the others in the crowd) I told you!

CROWD 2: Have we come here for nothing!?

ALEX: We wanted to get across the message in a way which was different – information, yes, but also in a way which, stirred up a bit of excitement – a story which -

CROWD 5: I don't believe this.

SAM: It was never meant to be a lie – just a fable, a simple story to help us all see more clearly – it wasn't meant to be a lie. Stories aren't lies.

CROWD 6: Oh great.

CROWD 4: Do you know what you've done!

CROWD 2: I might sue.

CROWD 5: Yeah... 'trades description act'.

CROWD 3: Shouldn't be allowed.

CROWD 1: The youth of today...

CROWD 6: I was so sure they really meant it – I was sure.

**CHRIS TAKES A DECISIVE STEP FORWARD AND SPEAKS OUT CLEARLY,
TO STOP THE CROWD FROM DISSIPATING**

CHRIS: It wasn't a lie! (silence, the crowd stops) It wasn't a lie. It was me, I was the one – am the one. And it wasn't *a tale, a myth, a story, a fable*, any of those. It happened, and it happened to me. It was me that first told it and I told it because I believed it...and in the last few days, I'll be honest, I did begin to (can't quite find the words) - there was so much babble, so much chaos, I was confused, mixed up. But coming back here (looks to the tree) being close to this... I can say, honestly...

SAM: (quietly, aside) Don't! Not now – it's all right. It's over, we're just digging a bigger hole now. It went wrong, bad idea, my fault, my mistake.

CHRIS: (calmly) *Your mistake* was not to believe me when I told you what happened. (back to the crowd) I can't explain it, can't properly describe it, I only know it happened, I saw things, felt things, understood things in a way I never thought possible. I never used to care about this stuff, but

now... (trails off) I'm not mad, I'm not a liar, not a story-teller, or even a myth-maker – (with certainty) *I'm just telling you what happened.*

CROWD 6: I knew it was real.

CROWD 1: This is a joke.

CHRIS: No, not a joke – an appeal. After it happened I kind of went to ground, hid-away. And I've spent days trying to work out what happened - and why. And I think, if anything, - this is going to sound far-fetched - if anything, I was a – voice, a mouthpiece for something which is normally silent.

CROWD 1: (dismissive) Yeah, right.

CHRIS: (earnestly, almost a little angrily) Yes – right! Listen, trust me, I didn't want it to happen, didn't expect it to happen, don't know how it happened – I only know it did, so I have to just deal with that. I was perfectly happy before this – life was normal, life was fine, I could have carried on like that, just fine thanks...but now...now...

CROWD 6: Touch the tree!

CHRIS: Oh come on!

CROWD 5: Yeah – go on.

CROWD 4: Touch it.

CHRIS: Don't be stupid!

CROWD 4: Don't call me stupid!

CROWD 1: We're not the ones talking to trees.

CROWD 6: Prove it.

CROWD 2: Let's see it.

CHRIS: I don't need to touch it. And even if I did – nothing might happen, not this time, not ever. But it did, *once*, and that's what matters. It's not a trick, not a circus act to be rolled out just because you turn up to see it – it doesn't work like that. It's not like pressing an 'on' button and expecting the power light to come on – it's not like that...

CROWD 2: Oh that's convenient!

CHRIS: I can't make it any different than it is.

CROWD 6: If you're a voice – a mouthpiece...?

CHRIS: Yes?

CROWD 6: What does it want to say...?

CROWD 5: Yeah, what does it want to say?

CHRIS: (Chris finally moves closer to the tree) What does it want to say...?
There's so much to say, so much for us to learn if we'd only....(making an attempt) you know, 'be kinder to nature'.

CROWD 6: (disappointed) Is that it?

CHRIS: I guess, it wants to say...(stumbling, inarticulate) sort of - 'be gentler on the earth'. Something like that.

CROWD 1: (dismissive) Oh yeah, deep, that is...

CHRIS: (more decisive, realising the crowd is sceptical) If this tree could give a message to us, *if all the trees* could pass on something, anything, they'd say, (finally places a hand on the trunk) they say (a little haltingly at first)

TREE 1 & CHRIS: (TREE whispering) I stand. I watch. That is all I do. But the standing, the watching, is enough. (with more strength & conviction) For someone must note the passing of the days and years, chronicle the changes, or how will we know where we have been or where we are going.

TREE 1, 2 & CHRIS: (TREE a little louder) Your lifetime is so short, your time here so brief, your chance to understand so little – but my span is long, pushing back roots deep into history, yours and mine, and sending out shoots to the future, yours and mine.

TREE 1, 2, 3 & CHRIS: (TREE almost as loud as CHRIS) I have much to say but few will listen, the days of listening to our kind seem far off now, a distant memory. If any should wish to hear my words, my story, what I have seen, see now and will see, they need only ask. I, and my kind serve you well, and in the past you have served us well also. We have been everything to you: a source of shelter, of material to build your home, to warm your winter & light your darkness. (TREE & CHRIS now fluent, confident) We have provided you with everything from the ships that allowed you to spread your arms around the globe to a playground for your little ones. And you gave us the space to simply be, to stand, to watch. It was a deal, a balance, a covenant. A covenant broken is a dangerous thing. We make the very air that you breathe, you cross us at your peril.

**BLACKOUT, MUSIC BUILDS, AS THE WHOLE CAST MOVE TO FACE THE FRONT.
SUDDEN SILENCE.**

EPILOGUE: SHARED BETWEEN THE WHOLE CAST, LINE BY LINE, STRAIGHT TO THE AUDIENCE

How long ago did this start to happen?

When did we begin to fail to listen to the wisdom of trees – when was the deal broken?

When was the covenant forgotten?

When did we blur the line between our *needs* and our *wants*?

Was it our hands that made this fracture, this tear– will it be ours that makes things whole again?

Maybe the song is right...

...that we won't know what we've got until it's gone.

You see, we really are in the same boat – it's just that the boat happens to be a planet, and we can't afford to sink it.

There's a connectedness which we can only wonder at...

Einstein is supposed to have said:

'If the simple honeybee disappeared off the surface of the globe then man would only have four years of life left'.

Might be true –might be right...

Might be untrue – might be...a myth...

All we have is each other – we are the problem, we are the solution.

That was our brief – to promote debate, debate in your head and your heart.

A debate between the devil and the angel on your shoulder. A choice.

Could we simply *choose* our way out of this?

After all, every product bought is a choice

Every switch flicked is a choice

Every button pushed, every key turned, choice after choice

And each choice we make leaves a wake, a trail, a thread

And in that wake, we will live, and those that follow us

Can we make a tragedy with a happy end?

Forgive us if we have told you tales and stories and lies today

Beautiful lies to deliver ugly truths – *righteous deceit*.

Excuse us our pretence and our preaching – just this once
(with a new tone) Here is a truth; I am not just an actor, a character
parading in a pretence of a play– my name is (all the actors, one by one,
give their *real names*)
(as the final one says their name they continue) And my name is ...(states
their name)..and this is real, no show, no tale, no pretence, just an appeal.
Make good choices (takes a moment to reflect) if not for you, then for us -
yes, *make good choices*, and listen, *listen* - to the wisdom of trees.

END

‘PAVING PARADISE’

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INTRODUCTION:

This play was developed with young people from Woodroffe School, Lyme Regis. It tries to articulate complex notions of our relationship with the natural world with equal measures of drama, charm and humour.

Paving Paradise is made up of three distinct strands:

- The sombre musings of a local aged tree
- A group of 6 students who have to prepare an environmental project in one week
- The *new myths* which the students invent to try to explore the theme

All three strands come together after the least likely student has what can only be called a *metaphysical epiphany* with the tree, which is taken, by the others, as just another invented myth. By the close of the play the story has spread and the final scene sees the students facing national and international press, believers and sceptics. In what I think is a bold move, the final lines of the piece are delivered not as characters, but as the young participants themselves, speaking directly to their audience.

The different strands offer up opportunities for radically differing theatrical approaches in the one play from physical theatre or even perhaps dance or puppetry, and with naturalistic, poetic and choral speaking etc. I hope that the various ingredients are

distinct enough to give directors and actors something to really get into. The play is probably suitable for casts of ages 12-18 and with a group size of anything from 15 – 30+ *of either gender or any mix of both and from any ethnic background*.

Paving Paradise is available to youth theatre & school casts internationally. The Performing Rights fee per public performance is £65.00 (or international equivalent).

Richard Conlon has been writing for young actors since his days in youth theatre in the 1980s. His work is published by Samuel French. He works across internationally as a writer, director and workshop leader.

CAST LIST

TREE 1, 2 & 3: I haven't suggested what kind of tree this is, but oaks are known to live for over a thousand years and yews can survive much longer.

THE PUPILS (ALL CAN BE EITHER GENDER):

SAM: A bright, articulate young person, aiming to get as much out of the project as possible. Keen, enthusiastic, a good communicator & pretty diplomatic.

CHRIS: A bit sullen and lazy, doesn't see the point of anything the group are doing. Would rather be at home on the Xbox. Chris doesn't often get what is being asked of them and resents having to do it.

JOOLS: Tetchy, easily angered & wanting to find the simplest & quickest way to get the project done. Can be quite brusque in communication – but only really wants to make everything run smoothly.

ALEX: Is only interested in the performance, wants to sing & dance as if in a west-end show – likes the idea of glitz & glamour. Very sweet but quite shallow.

TERRY: Quite dour & downbeat. A deep thinker but slow at communicating things, thinks people don't understand them, so can seem a bit aloof. Terry really does care about the subject matter

JAY: Is much more sciencey/mathsy, wants to look at the environmental part of their project much more than the art bit. Eager to get involved, but a bit unsure...about telling stories to communicate facts.

THE MYTH CAST (6): Of any size or gender, this cast is the physical & vocal manifestation of the myths that are invented by the pupils. They allow us to see and experience the stories being invented and suggested.

TEACHER: A memory from one of SAM's earlier classes.

PRESENTER 1 & 2: Faces from local TV News

REPORTER 1 & 2: The 'on-the-spot' journalists at the park

DJ: A local radio voice, canvassing local opinion from the studio

SAM: A curmudgeonly local who think we should go back to national service and flogging.

NAT: The kind who probably dances naked around trees at midnight

DOCTOR: A local GP

INTERNATIONAL PRESENTERS: Voices of world news reporters,

CROWD (5): The group which visits the park to see the spectacle. Made up of all actors who are not TREE or the central pupils.